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SUBJECT: ADVANI'S DRAMATIC PERFORMANCE IN PAKISTAN PROVOKES
DEEP DIVISION IN THE BJP

Classified By: Charge Bob Blake, Jr. for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

1. (C) Summary: During his landmark May 30-June 6 trip to Pakistan, Opposition Leader LK Advani renounced his former antagonism towards Pakistan and its founder Mohammad Ali Jinnah, lauding him as a secular "ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity." Advani's public recognition of Pakistani sovereignty and rejection of the RSS insistence of a "united India" that would reabsorb Pakistan and Bangladesh, and his characterization of the destruction of the Babri Mosque as "the saddest day in my life," signified a clear break with his earlier Hindutva (Hindu nationalist) ideology. The dramatic visit outraged Advani's former supporters in the Sangh Parivar (Hindu family of organizations), who called him a "traitor to India's Hindus," and called for his resignation from Parliament. The Sangh Parivar serves as the bedrock of the BJP, and will now intensify its call for Advani's removal as party president, setting off yet more conflict within an already deeply divided party. End Summary.

A Kindler, Gentler Advani

2. (U) BJP Party President LK Advani's May 30-June 6 trip to Pakistan was a spectacular break with his past. His first visit there in 27 years has attracted considerable attention in both countries because of his dramatic statements on issues that have long concerned the RSS and other Hindutva organizations which form the backbone of the BJP. The Indian press prominently covered Advani's public statements and activities as he seemed to repudiate his earlier hard-line image and reach out to the Pakistani people. The news which provoked the strongest commentary in India were as follows:

-- During a June 2 speech at a South Asia Free Media Association (a prominent Track-2 NGO) event in Lahore, Advani acknowledged Pakistan as a separate, sovereign, and independent nation. This signaled his acceptance of the two-nation theory and repudiation of the RSS declaration of "Akhand Bharat" (United India) that rejects the creation of Pakistan and Bangladesh and calls for their reabsorption into a "greater India." Any recognition of Pakistan's legitimacy is anathema to Hindutva ideology;

-- Reinforcing this message on June 6, Advani became the first Indian leader to pay his respects at the mausoleum of Pakistan's Founding Father, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, and visited a former Jinnah family home in Karachi that is now a museum;

-- In public statements during the trip, Advani publicly referred to Jinnah as an "ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity," a phrase originally coined by former Congress Party President Sarojini Naidu before Jinnah left the Congress Party to press for an independent Pakistan;

-- Advani called Jinnah a "secular leader," quoting at length from his August 11, 1947 speech that included the line: "You may belong to any religion or caste or creed, that has nothing to do with the business of the state;"

-- Advani reportedly also emphasized the close cultural and personal ties between Indians and Pakistanis, by adding that "There is a little bit of India in every Pakistani, and a little bit of Pakistan in every Indian;"

-- He described the December 6, 1992 destruction of the Babri Masjid as "the saddest day of my life;" and

-- The Opposition Leader laid a foundation stone for the restoration of what could be the oldest Hindu temple in Pakistan, and invited Pakistan President Musharraf to do likewise at an Indian mosque.

A Traitor to Hindutva

3. (U) Advani's behavior set off a firestorm of criticism by his erstwhile friends and allies within the Sangh Parivar (family of Hindu organizations). RSS spokesman Ram Madhav denounced his statements in Pakistan, saying "What Advaniji said in Karachi and earlier was not in line with RSS thinking. The cadre is unhappy and confused, and the people are angry." Madhav reiterated that in the view of the RSS, Jinnah is blamed as one of the principal architects of the

break-up of India. He also rejected Advani's assertion that Jinnah's August 11, 1947 speech proved his secular credentials, saying "a man should not be judged by one sentence or a single action. His life and beliefs have to be taken in totality."

14. (U) The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), another principal component of the Sangh Parivar, was equally critical. VHP leader Ashok Singhal claimed that Advani meant to "deceive the people of the country," saying that "the Advani era of the BJP was over." Singhal questioned how Advani could characterize the day of the Babri Mosque's destruction as the "saddest in my life," insisting that such an assertion amounted to a renunciation of Advani's participation in the Ram Temple movement. "How can a Ram Temple be built in Ayodhya without bringing down the mosque at the site?" he asked. Another VHP leader, Pravin Togadia, was more adamant, stating "Jinnah was a traitor, is a traitor and will remain a traitor. A person glorifying him is also a traitor." In Advani's Gujarat constituency, the VHP led demonstrations condemning him for alleged "anti-Hindu" remarks, and called for him to resign from Parliament, as he had "lost the confidence of the 900 million Hindus of India."

Moderates are Not so Sure

15. (U) In a reflection of the deep and growing cleavages between the Sangh Parivar and other, more moderate, members of the BJP, former party President Venkaiah Naidu rejected calls for Advani's resignation stating "There is no question of seeking LK Advani's resignation. We will discuss the issue with him when he returns." The pro-BJP "Pioneer" praised Advani, characterizing the visit as "a milestone on the road to Peace," and that his willingness to pay a personal visit to Pakistan "sums up, more than a thousand rhetorical statements, the new desire for peace in the two countries. The newspaper's editors lauded Advani for recognizing that "there has been a sea change in the climate in Pakistan," which is "tending to move towards religious tolerance and pluralism - and away from Islamist fundamentalism."

Comment

16. (C) The Advani visit demonstrated that the wide cleavages dividing the Hindutva and non-Hindutva components of the BJP are becoming increasingly insurmountable. The RSS and VHP have called for Advani's resignation and his replacement by a "younger" (read more hard-line) leader. Advani's embrace of a more pragmatic approach to Pakistan reflects the growing realization that the old Hindutva ideology must be set aside if the party hopes to return to power. Advani knows he can not realize his dream of becoming India's next Prime Minister without distancing himself from his past and has chosen to do so in a dramatic fashion. The Sangh Parivar will now try intensify its drive to replace Advani, signifying a growing battle for the heart and soul of the BJP.

BLAKE